

U.S. Department of Energy  
Carlsbad Field Office  
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant  
P.O. Box 3090  
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221

**Media Contacts:**

Dennis Hurtt  
U.S. DOE Carlsbad Field Office  
(505) 234-7327

Susan Scott  
Washington TRU Solutions  
(505) 234-7204 (800) 493-9768  
<http://www.wipp.ws>

# DOENews

**For Immediate Release**

## **EPA Approves Remote-Handled Waste Procedures for WIPP**

**CARLSBAD, N.M., March 30, 2004** – The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced today that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has approved DOE's implementation plans to characterize defense-related remote-handled transuranic (RH-TRU) wastes for disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). EPA regulates the long-term disposal of radioactive materials.

"We're pleased that EPA has endorsed our plan for characterizing RH-TRU waste," said R. Paul Detwiler, acting manager, DOE Carlsbad Field Office. "Although RH represents a small percentage of the waste that will be sent to WIPP, its disposal is critical to DOE's cleanup of the Cold War's legacy."

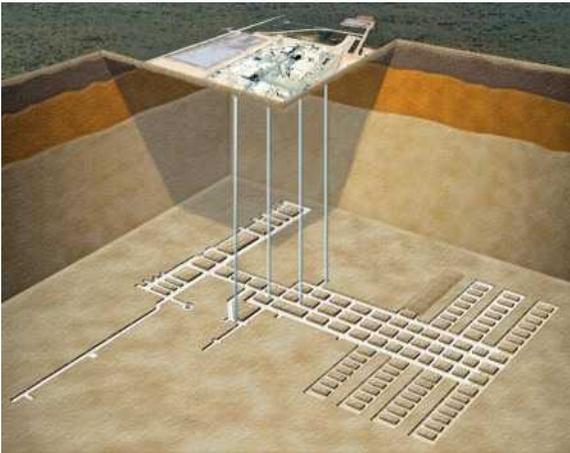
RH-TRU waste is one of two categories of TRU waste that will be disposed of at WIPP. To ensure that RH-TRU wastes sent to WIPP meet strict disposal standards, EPA required DOE to submit a waste characterization plan that describes the methods DOE will use to determine the radiological properties of this waste.

EPA approval of the plan allows DOE to proceed in developing site-specific characterization plans for 13 facilities that currently store RH-TRU waste. In addition to EPA, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) must approve DOE plans to characterize the hazardous components in RH-TRU wastes, such as solvents and lead,

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before RH-TRU waste operations for mixed waste can begin at WIPP. DOE submitted its request for NMED's approval in June 2002.

Before EPA's approval, WIPP could accept only contact-handled TRU waste, which requires no additional shielding beyond the waste container to protect workers. Because RH-TRU waste emits more penetrating radiation, it must be handled with equipment and transported with protective shielding. RH-TRU waste will constitute approximately four percent of the total volume of waste to be disposed of at WIPP.



WIPP is the nation's solution for cleaning up defense-generated transuranic waste left from the research and production of nuclear weapons. Located 26 miles east of Carlsbad, New Mexico, WIPP opened March 26, 1999, and has safely received and disposed of over 2,400 waste shipments. WIPP facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient stable salt formation nearly one-half mile underground.